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Family System In Islam

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Islam on Sexuality, Reproduction and Family System

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PREFACE

As the title of the paper suggests, Dr. Zeenath Kausar has attempted to present the Islamic perspective on sexuality, reproduction and family system.

Family values play an important role from the Islamic point of view. Islam seeks to create durable bases for relationship within the family, which is the building block of a society. When each of these blocks is firmly placed, the social structure of the society rests on a strong foundation. Where the cohesive bond gets diluted, the society begins to tumble.

The Western society presents a glaring example of this phenomenon. The growing number of single-parent families in the wake of rampant divorces has created a situation in which uninhibited sex has culminated in the outbreak of AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases.

An important factor for the breakdown of marriages in the West is the fact that marital relations in Western societies are governed by material considerations, such as wealth, beauty or fame. These are ephemeral values doomed to self-erosion in the course of time. When that happens, the fragile relationship gets swerved and the marriage ends in divorce.

By contrast, marital ties in the Muslim society are on firmer ground. Families seeking alliances also look for partners with a strong moral character, among other things. Thus if the married life of a couple becomes a bit bumpy, they still pull on for the sake of their children to whom they owe a religious obligation to bring up properly.

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Let me conclude with these words of wisdom from Caliph Omar. Once a man sought his advice on divorcing his wife. When Caliph Omar asked him for the reason, the man replied: "I'm no more in love with her." Whereupon, Caliph Omar retorted: "Are families built upon love alone? What about inter-family relationship and the shared life with their children?"

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ISLAM ON SEXUALITY, REPRODUCTION AND FAMILY SYSTEM

Introduction:

1. Life an Integrated Whole:

Islam, which implies willing and complete submission to Allah (swt) is a complete way of life embracing all aspects of life including sexual, reproductive, marital and familial. It underlines two important points:
Firstly, Islam perceives life as an integrated whole and for this reason sexuality and reproduction are parts of the whole Islamic system of life, not outside it.
Secondly, Islam which is a Divinely ordained system of life, possesses injunctions and regulations in its texts - the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions for the regulation of sexuality, reproduction and all that are related to these.

Islamic philosophy of Tawhid integrates all aspects of life. Tawhid implies unity of God, unity of the prophets, unity of life, unity of mankind, unity of the purpose of creation, unity of knowledge, etc. The fundamental beliefs -
i) That there is no god but Allah (swt) and the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) is the last messenger of Allah (swt) for the whole mankind;
ii) That man's life in this world is temporary and he/she has to follow Allah's ordained way of life (Islam) in all aspects to be successful here and in Hereafter and;
iii) That with Allah rests all the final judgements of rewards and punishments in the akhirah (life, hereafter) are all based on these Unity, Tawhid. Hence, questions on 'sexuality' and 'reproduction' are also anchored on the Tawhidic paradigm.

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II. Vicegerency - Purpose of Life:

The very raison d'etre of man's creation according to the Qur'an is the performance of the vicegerency of Allah (swt). The Qur'an says:

Behold Thy Lord said to the angels:
I will create a vicegerent on earth.

Hence, any thought and activity of man in Islam, be that sexual or reproductive, should be ultimately related to this purpose of life vicegerency of Allah (swt).

Sexuality and Reproduction:

With this brief background of Islamic worldview, it is easier now to look into the Islamic texts on sexuality and reproduction.

Sexuality in Islam is not trivialized as man's animalistic function to be tackled by his own whim and fancy. Sexuality is perceived as one of the essential parts of man's life to be regulated and disciplined through the proper guidance.

A man and a woman in Islam can enter into sexual relationship only after marriage, which is reckoned as a 'sign' of Allah (swt) and the ways of the prophets', The Qur'an says:
And among His Signs is this that He created spouses for you from yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them.
We indeed sent messengers before you (O Mohammad) and We assigned them wives and children.

It implies that in Islam, the very basis of the marital relationship between husband and wife through which they can enter into sexual relationship is 'love'. Furthermore, Allah (swt) implants

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this 'love' in husband and wife towards each other so that they may live in peace and harmony. Such an Islamic attitude towards sexuality goes entirely against the mere lusty cravings in man/woman and its satisfaction through legitimate or illegitimate ways. In Islam, it is the 'love' and the strong covenant (nikah) that unite man and woman not 'force' or temporary arrangements outside marriage or cohabitation. For this reason, all types of pre-marital and extra marital relationships, fornication, illicit carnality are completely condemned is Islam and man is ordained not to go nearer to adultery. The Qur'an says:

Nor come nigh to adultery
For it is a shameful (deed)
And an evil, opening the road
(to other evils).

Islam thus makes a distinction between sexuality that is constrained and disciplined through marital relationship and sexuality, which transgresses morality and spirituality and turns animalism. Islam does not overlook the sexual drive in man but institutionalize it through marriage to protect man from immorality. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said:
O young men! Those among you who can support a wife should marry for it restrains eyes from casting (evil glances) and preserves one from immorality.

Islam is quite sensitive in all issues pertaining to marriage and sexuality. As sexuality outside marriage is illegitimate, marriage without the proper consent is declared invalid. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said:

'A widow shall not be married until she be consulted, nor shall a virgin be, married until her consent be asked; and that a woman ripe in years shall have her consent asked in marriage and if she refuses, she shall not be married by force.'

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Therefore, marriage in Islam, unlike radical feminism is neither an imprisonment for woman that is thrust or forced upon her as a punishment nor enslavement that makes her subservient to man. Marriage is a covenant of faith and consent and a bond of love and concern.

Marital relationship in Islam is neither patriarchal and political nor economic and sexual for its own sake as against the common perception of gender feminists, but moral and spiritual. In fact, husband and wife complement each other in Islam since husband provides economic and sexual security to his wife and his children and his wife guards her chastity and her husband's possessions as her moral obligation. The Qur'an says:

Men are the protectors
And maintainers of women, because God
Has given the ones more (strength)
Than the other, and because
They support them
From their means
Therefore the righteous women
Are devoutly obedient and guard
In (the husband's) absence
What God would have them guard.

Thus, husband and wife in Islam complement each other and do not compete for domination and supremacy. They are friends and co-partners in their co-venture-vicegerency of Allah (swt). Both enjoy rights and duties towards each other and both have obligations to Allah (swt). This is very clearly stated in the Qur'anic verse which proclaims equality in the very creation of man and woman, pointing out their creation from a single soul:

O mankind, be conscious of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, created of like nature, her mate, and from the two created and spread many men and women; and be mindful

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of your duty to God by Whose name you appeal to one another and to (the ties of) womb. Verily God watches over you.

Even if the sexual satisfaction is performed by man and woman while being mindful of its etiquette as ordained in the Qur'an and Sunnah, it is reckoned as *ibadah* and *sadaqah* (charity). The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said:

Did Allah not make for you that from which you can give *sadaqa*? Verily, every time you say *Subhana Allah*, there is a *sadaqua* and for every time you say Allahu Akbar there is a *sadaqa;*
Every time you say *Laa ilaha ill Allah*, there is a *sadaqa* and for every time you say *Alhamdulillah*, there is a *sadaqa;*
Every act of enjoining what is right there is *sadaqa* and in every act of forbidding evil there is a *sadaqa*, and in your sexual relations also there is a *sadaqa.*

Thereupon the companions asked: O Messenger of Allah! Is there a reward for one of us when he satisfies his sexual desire?

The Prophet replied: Don't you see, had he satisfied it with the forbidden would there not have been a sin upon him? The companions said: "yes".

The Prophet (pbuh) said: In the same way, when he satisfies it with the lawful, there is for him in that a reward.

Thus, sexuality is never perceived by Islam as a mere carnal desire of man to be fulfilled in any animalistic way as he pleases. But man in Islam is ordained to follow certain etiquette in his sexual relationship so that he should remember Allah (swt) even before this act and do not fall a prey to the Satanic trap. This can be easily gleaned through a careful reading of few Prophetic traditions, either practiced or spoken by him on these matters.

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It is exhorted that the husband should place his hand on the forelock of her wife at the time of consummating the marriage and pray for Allah's blessings. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said:

When any of you marries a woman he should hold her forelock, mention Allah most high, and pray for His blessings saying: O Allah, I ask You for the good in her and the good with which You have created her; and I seek refuge in You from the evil in her and the evil with which You have created her.

Furthermore, according to some other traditions, it is desirable if the husband presents to his wife something to drink to show kindness to her and to offer prayer together to remain closely ever after for the good and seek refuge in Allah (s.w.t) from the evil. It is also evidenced from several traditions that it is commendable to make 'wudhu' (ablution) after sex before sleep but obligatory to take bath after sex before or after sleep whenever possible.

It is quite obvious from the above discussion that sexuality in Islam is neither perceived as an objective of life to be totally immersed in it with no other moral and spiritual considerations nor a beastly act to be fulfilled through any way and mean for its own sake. Islam disciplines sexual desire of man and also expects from him that he should remember Allah (swt) even while joining his wife for sex and even pray to Allah (swt) to protect his child from evil, if he is granted a child after the sex. It is clear from the following prayer and the Prophetic tradition:

In the name of Allah, O Allah! Keep us away from the devil, and keep the devil away from that which You may grant us (offspring).

The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said:

After that, if Allah decrees that they will have a child, the devil will never be able to harm that child.

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It also implies that Islam not only enjoins man to remember Allah (swt) before his sexual relationship but also makes him conscious of his responsibility towards his prospective child to protect him from the cunning Satan.

Family: Parents Obligations Towards Children

Sexuality, reproduction and children's responsibility are interconnected in Islam through an institution, family. Family is considered as the first school of children where they are not only nurtured but also taught basic morals and etiquette so that the children can appreciate Islamic ethos and values. A stable family will give rise to a stable society and a stable civilization. All this requires that both parents and children should be mindful of their obligations towards each other along with their rights so that they may love and respect each other. Islam enjoins its adherents to love children and to be mindful of their responsibilities towards them from the very beginning of their inception and even earlier to it. The Qur'an says:

... And be mindful of your duty to God in whose name you appeal to one another and to the ties of the womb.

Thus, Islam emphasizes that parents should realize that the proper development of the child begins from the mother's womb itself. Hence the parents should be concerned about their prospective child from the very beginning.

It has been scientifically proved that a pregnant woman should abstain from alcoholic drinks and narcotics and avoid tensions. If she fails to consider all these precautionary measures, any complication in her own health and that of the child in the womb can hardly be prevented. It is also pointed out that the relationship between the prospective mother and the prospective father should not be conflict-ridden because it adversely affects the mental and

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physical health of the prospective mother and eventually the prospective child. Islam through the above quoted verse emphatically makes it clear that parents should be mindful of their duties towards their children from the very inception.

Islam commands its believers not only to take care of the physical upbringing of their children but also their educational, moral and spiritual development. The Qur'an says:

O you who believe! Strive to protect yourselves and your wives and children from the fire.

Obviously, the best way of protecting children from the fire is by providing adequate education and proper training. More than the wealth and the material property, children require best education for their real success here and in the Hereafter. The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said:

Of all that a father can give to his children the best is their good education and training.

In the contemporary age, where Muslim Ummah is facing multitudes of intellectual challenges, the above Prophetic tradition needs greater focus. Unless children are mentally well fed with proper education and skills, they become easily susceptible to alien culture and lifestyles. Today's children are tomorrow's future. The strong foundation of the future prospects of Islamic culture and civilization depends on strong educational foundation of the children. It deems necessary for them to be well acquainted of the dominant ideologies, as well as, Islam as the comprehensive system of life so that they should be the role models in the future to take care of the Ummah's responsibility vis-a-vis mankind. The Qur'an teaches its adherents to pray to Allah (swt) for their children with these aspirations-.

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My Lord make me keep prayer and (also) let my offspring (do so) Our Lord accept my appeal! Our Lord, forgive my parents and me.

Our Lord! Grant us in our spouses and our offspring the comfort of our eyes and make us a model for the needful.

It also implies that Islam completely rejects the perception of those who look to women and children as burden or as an oppressed class. In fact, Islam inspires men to look at their wives and children as the comforters of their eyes, as their source of joy, peace and solace and not a suppressed and oppressed class to be dominated and over-powered. Man's domination and suppression of woman and children go against the very spirit of Islam, which asserts that 'command is only for Allah', not for man. The time when a child is born, the Islamic clarion call that 'there is no god but Allah' is conveyed into his ears, which implies that he should submit to none save Allah. Besides, it is also evident from one of the traditions that whenever a child in the Prophet's (pbuh) household begins to speak, the Prophet (pbuh) thought him the second verse of Surah al-Furqan which gives the message of Allah's Sovereignty and the Unity of God (Tawhid). The translation of its verse is as follows:

He to Whom belongs
The dominion of the heavens
And the earth- no son
Has He begotten, nor Has He
A partner in His dominion
It is He Who created
All things, and ordered them
In due proportions.

So from the very beginning, Islam emphasizes that children should be ingrained with the Tawhidic message and that they should willingly submit to none but Allah. It does not however mean that

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they are not expected to obey their parents rather Islam enjoins children to be good to their parents which shall be discussed later.

Islam also encourages that both parents, mother and father should express their utmost love to their children, give them time, play with them and cheer them up through many ways of interaction with them. It is reported that Hadrat Amir (may Allah be pleased with him) who held a high position in the government during the reign of Hadrat Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) once visited the house of Hadrat Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and was surprised to see that few children had mounted the chest of Caliph and were engaged in playing. Seeing the astonishment of Amir (may Allah be pleased with him) the Caliph enquired about his treatment to his children? Upon this, he replied: "Amir ul-Mu'minin, as soon as I enter my house the people of my household are struck with terror and stand dumb with fear. On hearing this, the Caliph said: "Amir (may Allah be pleased with you) you are a follower of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and yet are ignorant of the important injunction that a Muslim should behave towards his family members with extreme love and deep tenderness."

It explicitly reveals that Islam is completely against the despotic and tyrannical attitude of father and male members of the family over wives and children. Islam expects from man a gentlemanly behavior not harsh approach towards his family. The Prophet (pbuh) said:

The best of you is he who is the best to his family, and I am the best to my family.

The relationship between man and woman in Islam is not therefore the relationship of master and servant but that of garments to each other and also protecting friends of one another. The Qur'an says:

They are garments for you and you are garments for them.

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Thus the very basis of family in Islam are faith, love, concern and care for each other so that it turns out to be a civilizing ground for children. Husband and wife who live in peace and love with each other can concentrate well over their children and can bring them up with moral excellence, best education and spiritual orientation. Such children would not only contribute their potentialities towards the construction of society in future, but will remain as a blessing for their parents even after the death of their parents. Parents of such children will continue to enjoy the rewards of their best education and training, which they imparted to their children. The Prophet (pbuh) said-.

The actions of man cease with his death. But there are three deeds whose reward and blessing continue to reach him even after death. One that he should make a *sadaqa jariah* (recurring charity); Secondly, he should leave behind a legacy of knowledge from which people may continue to derive benefit; Thirdly, pious offspring who continuously invoke mercy of Allah upon him.

Children are the blessings which Allah (swt) bestow to parents. But if these children are not educated and trained properly, they become nuisance to the parents and the society. Whereas, if the children are adequately educated and trained, they shall become bearers of Islamic mission, transmitters of Islamic culture in the society and also best rewards for their deceased parents.

Islam forbids abortion and infanticide. The Qur'an says:

Slay not your children fearing poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Lo! The slaying of them is great sin.

Those who kill their children out of their foolishness are the greatest losers.

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Thus, abortions, child-abuse and infanticide are all considered as heinous sins in Islam. Islam by its very nature is against cruelty and barbarity. Any use of contraception loop, shield, plastic or anything to cause abortion is forbidden. Even if abortion is done in seven days, it is unlawful, since the fertilized ovum is going to be a human being. However, only on one condition abortion is allowed - to save the life of the mother.

It is also important to point out here that Islam is not against technology, but misuse of technology. For instance, if technological devices help mothers to lessen some of their complications during prenatal period and childbirth, Islam has no objection. But, if the technological devices are discovered and used to let unmarried women or teenage girls to have babies if they wish to, Islam strongly objects it. Similarly, if such contraceptive devices are invented through which unmarried women or teenage girls can engage in sexual relationships without becoming pregnant, Islam rejects it completely. Likewise, Islam condemn high-tech reproductive aids developed to produce artificial mothers, fathers and children, as well as, technological ways and means through which lesbians and homosexuals engage in their deviant sexuality to get children. In fact, Islam is totally against all deviant forms of sexuality. The Qur'an says:

Would you really approach men in your lusts rather than women? Nay, ye are a people (grossly) ignorant.

Islam, no doubt encourages man to beget children, but through rightful mean not by unlawful act. The Qur'an points out how one of the Prophets Hadhrat Zakaria (peace be upon him) prayed to Allah (swt) for the pious offspring even in a very old age:

Lord! Bestow upon me by Thy bounty goodly offspring - Lo! Thou art the Hearer of prayer.

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As far as the 'invitro fertilization' (IVF) and test tube babies are concerned, Islam allows only if the 'ova' comes from the mother and the 'sperm' from the father and the embryo is transferred into the uterus of one's own wife. Any other usage of the 'invitro' fertilization' by any woman or man who are not married with each other but would like to follow this technology is not acceptable in Islam.

Islamic stance on artificial insemination is also quite clear. It forbids the use of the sperm of anyone other than that of the husband to be used in the process of artificial insemination. Such an act tantamount to adultery, from Islamic perspective, since it falls outside the martial union of man and woman.

Obligations of Children Towards their Parents:

There is a reciprocity of rights and duties in Islam. While parents are enjoined to be mindful of their children for their overall development, children are also exhorted to be obedient and kind to their parents.

Both parents and children have corresponding duties towards each other along with their rights. There are several Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions which throw abundance of light on the etiquette of children towards their parents. The Qur'an says:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none save Him and (that ye show) kindness to parents.
Islam thus ordained children to be kind and grateful to his parents. Good conduct towards parents is even regarded as a key to paradise. The Prophet (pbuh) said:

Your entry into Paradise or Hell depends on your good or bad conduct towards your parents.

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Another tradition of the Prophet (pbuh) also highlights the necessity of fair treatment to parents by children:

Let that man be disgraced, and disgraced again and let him be disgraced even more. The people Enquired: "O Prophet of God (pbuh) who is that man? The Prophet affirmed: "I refer to the man who finds his parents old in age - both of them or one of them - and yet did not earn entitlement to Paradise by rendering good service to them.

It seems also pertinent to point out here that although children are exhorted to be obedient and kind to both parents, a greater emphasis is given for more better treatment and devotion to mother. This is obviously because of her greater sacrifices and sufferings for children. The Qur'an says:

And We have commanded unto man kindness towards parents His mother beareth him with suffering bringing forth with suffering, bearing him and weaning of him in thirty months.

This is also illustrated through various Prophetic traditions:

I enjoin man about his mother.
I enjoin man about his mother.
I enjoin man about his mother.
I enjoin man about his father.

Thus motherhood in Islam is not discarded as a burden, a stumbling block for woman's development, a source of oppression and suppression. It is looked upon with respect and honor and is considered as a blessing from Allah (swt) to man. Motherly affection and care deems indispensable for the proper upbringing of children along with father's affection and concern. Motherhood is regarded as an essential institution for human civilization.

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As discussed above, Islam attaches great importance to the mutual love and concern for each other in the family. As father is asked to pray to Allah (swt) to bring in his wife and children comfort for his eyes, children are exhorted to show glances of love and devotion to parents. The Prophet (pbuh) said:

"The pious offspring who castes a single look of affection at his parents receives a reward from God equal to the reward of an accepted Hajj." The people submitted: "O Prophet of Allah (peace be upon you), if someone casts a hundred such glances of love and affection at his parents, what then?" The Prophet replied: "Yes, indeed, even if one does so a hundred time a day, he will get a hundred fold reward. God is far greater than you imagine and is completely free from petty narrow mindedness.

Children are also exhorted to pray for their parents:

O, our Lord! Grant forgiveness to my parents and me and pardon all the faithful on the Day of Reckoning.

Few Observations on the Above Discussion:

1. Sexuality, reproduction and parents and children relationship in the family are all perceived in Islam as natural and essential aspects of man's life and are not separated from the whole Tawhidic framework of life and thought. Man is always reminded to be mindful of Allah's guidance all through these relationships whether sexual or parental.

2. Sexuality and reproduction outside marriage are rejected downright and considered unlawful, no matter all technological devices make them possible outside marriage.

3. A loving, devoted, peaceful and harmonious relationship between husband and wife is greatly emphasized. Man's domination and woman's subservience to man are completely

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rejected. Men and women complement each other and not compete against each other. Islamic family system is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, rather consultational, shura-based.

4. An affectionate, cordial, intimate and a deeper relationship between parents and children is strongly upheld in Islam. A stable family of caring parents and devoted children is expected for a better society and a healthier civilization.

Conclusion:

We cannot afford to be complacent and take comfort in the Islamic theories of sexuality, reproduction, husband and wife relationship and parents and children relationship which are based on the Qur'anic injunctions and Prophetic traditions unless we see these theories are put into practice.

For instance, it is generally found out that the relationship patterns between husband and wife and between parents and children even in some Muslim societies are also not satisfactory. Broadly there are three problems:

1. Men tend to keep a despotic attitude towards women and children. There is a big communication gap between the male members and females and children. Men expect from women only familial service of cooking, cleaning and children care. Exchange of thoughts and ideas on any problem of the outside world, of Muslim Ummah, of intellectual or of any other field is almost absent. Instead of a loving and caring environment, a fearful and tensed environment prevails in the house because men usually maintain distance from women and children as a mark of their artificial honor. This sort of honor sometimes even turns to be horrific among other family members and distorts all sorts of relationships. Although it goes against Islamic injunctions as described above, sometimes even a religious halo is attached to it

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for which reason women and children could hardly express themselves and become victims of horror.

2. In some cases, women are alone expected to take over all the responsibilities of children and men completely exempt from it. For the better educational upbringing of children, both mother and father require to play their important roles. In those families where women are hardly educated, it becomes all the more problematic for children to get proper educational feedback. Whereas in some cases, where both parents are educated and working, again children become the victims since they do not get proper attention from their parents. Men claim that they are too busy and women blame men for non-co-operation in house-chores and claim that they are over-burdened with double workload and tend to neglect children. Children feel that they are alienated from both parents.

3. Due to lack of mutual understanding and confidence on each other, the relationships between husband and wife grows tensed and sometimes gives rise to divorce. Children of divorced parents turn out to be aggressive and anti-social.

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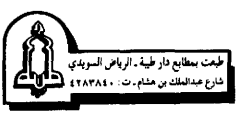
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نظام الأسرة في الإسلام

تأليف

د/ زينت كوثر

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